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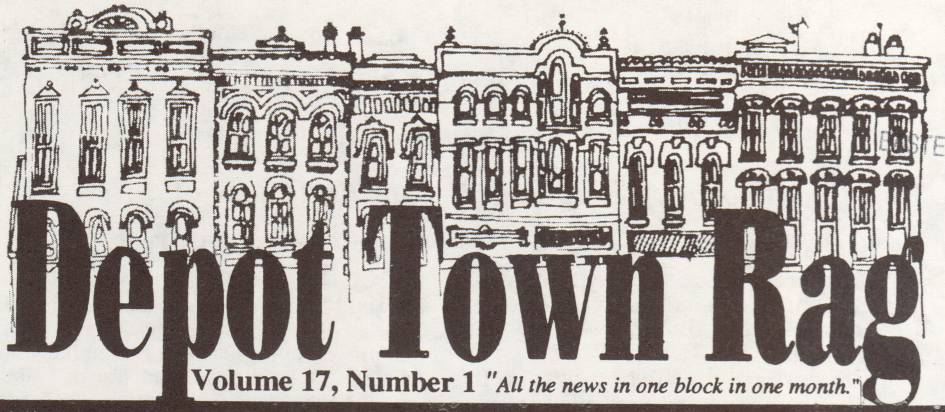

Depot Town Rag

Volume 17, Number 1 *"All the news in one block in one month."*

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, MI 48198

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Rag Content
January 1994

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JAN 1 1994

- **Train pix local?**
- Crime report
- Logos reviewed
- **Silly new series**

and other strictly local stuff. . . .

FREE THE DEPOT TOWN RAG
ALL THE NEWS YOU REALLY NEED TO KNOW

Our seventeenth year

We've coming a long way, baby! Marking its seventeenth year of publication, *The Depot Town Rag* seems to have gone through as many changes as this historic commercial block of buildings has experienced.

The first issues of *The Rag* were printed on white legal paper with a poster on the back advertising DTA's third Thursday meeting. The papers were hand--typed and xeroxed. The first ad was in August of 1979 when the Ypsilanti Farmers' Market opened. There was no other advertising in the initial issues. Most issues weren't dated - and that's a bit embarrasing today. Apparently the editors never thought they'd still be around.

In 1980 *The Rag* added pages and enjoyed the support of the Alibi Bar, River Artworks, J.C.T. Antiques, Sidetrack, Depot Exchange, Weber Drug, Jim MacDonald's Antiques, Shear Genius, and the Old Town Restaurant.

Soon the legal-size sheets were presented in a brown/gold format and the paper's banner looked like a roller coaster. "All the news you need to know," was the motto. Steve Gross, Rex and Sally Richie edited in 1982.

Eventually the paper came back to its roots with the oldest printing house in town and settled into the present two-fold format from Hansen's Standard Printing.

Each page of this issue carries some of the content from the earliest years of *The Rag's* publication on this block . . . .

Special thanks

...to the many loyal businesses who have supported the publication of *The Depot Town Rag* over all these years.

And very special thanks

...to those who continue to read this terribly local stuff.

And still more thanks

...to all the folks who continue telling their stories to the editor so he doesn't ever have to get very creative. Just recording them here seems to make for the kind of news we like to read on this block.

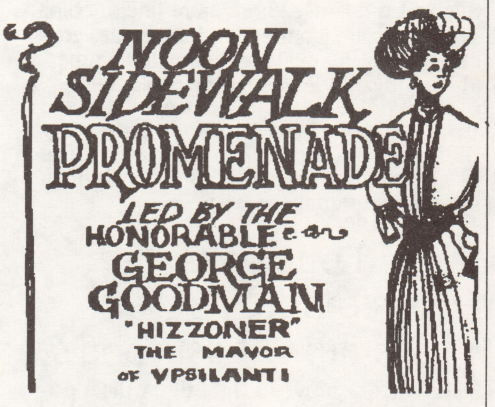
We continue to be a 'sunshine press' for a little district where the sun seems to shine a bit more than the in most other places.

1978 'Sidewalk Celebration' was a harbinger of things to come

Many of the sidewalks celebrated in Carolyn McKeever's 1978 poster at right have been dug up and replaced at least once by now, but Depot Towners remember the gala promenade when mayor George Goodman cut a ribbon into every shop on the block and we celebrated the removal of the City's parking meters. All the signs came after that.

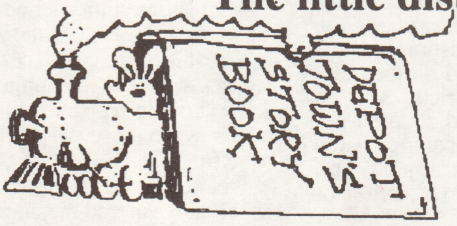
Some think it was this single event that caused preservationist visionaries to start the annual Heritage Festival, the Farmers' Market, lots of Victorian hoo-hah and all that jazz that's been heard continuously down here ever since.

It was aptly named: not a 'sidewalk sale,' but a celebration of smooth, new concrete!



The little district that could

From a 1980 edition of *The Rag*:



Maybe it was the stories our mothers and fathers read to us as children that got us into this Depot Town project with such optimism. "The Little Engine That Could" could easily be the trademark for the Depot Town Association.

In June of 1975, when Gerry French, Beverly Shankwiler and other charter DTAers drafted the original constitution for the Association, they had high hopes and even higher enthusaism. "We hope we can, we hope we can," they must have changed between beers at those Alibi planning sessions.

In 1976 the new Association drafted the Depot Town Plan and declared both long and short range goals for public and private sectors in the block. "We think you should, we think you should," shouted the rest of the City, tired of Depot Town's long and sad decay.

When Community Development Block Grants and other funds made street paving and the Farmers' Market realities, even previous non-DTA folk in the district stood up and shouted, "We think we can, we think we can!" Cynics of the past even joined the chorus with, "We thought we could, we thought we could." Pronouns have changed and many who used to say, "Depot Town, they ..." now are saying, "Depot Town, we ..."

Seems those storybook mountains go on forever, though. Actually buying a caboose for DTA office and meeting place seemed like a big item and DTA started the old railroad chant once more: "We hope we can, we think we can, we know we can ..." Now we are almost at the top of another hill — and coasting down the other side may pick up enough new inertia to support moving our old caboose from Detroit. When our caboose comes home to Depopt Town we will be able to chant again: "We knew we could, we knew we could."

Another of this year's DTA priorities is the development of improved parking facilities behind the buildings on the south side of Cross Street. The rhythm picks up again. "We think we can, we think we can..." The plan is there; financing is available, now we have only to get legal agreements from property owners from the Huron River to River Street. A big order? Impossible? Just another mountain to climb. "We think we can. WE THINK WE CAN...'

[But we couldn't. The project foundered for lack of support among the property owners at that time. Most of those buildings have new owners now, and the parking is being developed independently. "We knew they would. We knew they would!"]

Long, long awning appears at Heritage Square block

From the Depot Town Counseling Center to the Teachers Shop stretches the block's longest single accent color. The refreshing aqua accent connects the several storefronts which now make the old Anderson-Deck garage their home.

An earlier awning next to the Frog Island Park entry was done is small blue and white stripes, but it's replacement has an enormous and positive effect on the balance of color up and down the block.

Anyone who can remember the 1954 Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz movie will agree that this would be a perfect place to park the 'Long, Long Trailer.' (The slapstick movie was a Michigan product, too, since the trailer was built by the New Moon company of Alma, and the film's premier was held in that town's tiny local theater.)

Such a l-o-o-o-n-g, horizontal line of color gives a welcome contrast to the regular verticality of the 19th century Italianate commercial buildings in the rest of the block.

So much of the Fifties 'style' seemed to have missed the point and hoped to turn every building into a Prairie ranch home. The block's newest awning makes the transition in a most graceful manner.

Council outlaws nitrous oxide. What's next? Fast food?

In a righteous move to fight litter, the Ypsilanti City Council has said that local 'adult' bookstores can no longer sell those little 'poppers' of nitrous oxide to their customers. Rather than appear Puritanical, Council members interviewed expressed concern for the detritous left behind when consumers leave their wrappers in the alleys and on the sidewalks of those commercial districts.

Local fast food stands could soon be declared illegal by the same reasoning, if the collection of hamburger wrappers and styrofoam by-products is any indication of local legislation.

Recent complaints about large people in striped spandex pants have also come to the attention of local politicoes and anyone wearing certain clothing fashions may soon feel their wrath. Watch out for anyone wearing clothing that resembles:

- a contour drawing project
- badly installed store awning
- an undulating TV weathermap

As the next City election draws closer and the Charter Commission moves to streamline the processes, more creative legislation is expected to be offered up for the citizenry.

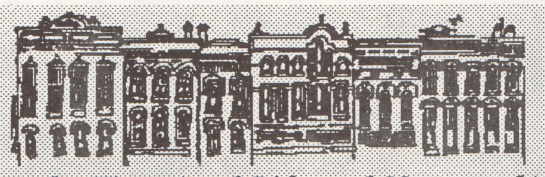
Once we get the school thing straightened out, we'll be able to dance in the streets again.

Hon's Flowers

46 East Cross

482-2124

Dateline: Depot Town:



A Neighborhood Forgotten by Time (and Life and Newsweek)

Coffee at the Co-op

Who doesn't love the way fresh coffee smells/ Americans are the world's leading coffee consumers. But, do we know what we're drinking?

There are over twenty-five species of coffee grown commercially, not to mention a number of grades within each botanical variety. All varieties have different qualities in aroma, acidity, and so on, which has made coffee a connoisseurs beverage: as luxurious as fine wine.

It is believed that coffee was first grown in Ethiopia back in 575 A.D., and then slowly made its way to ancient Greece. The first coffee shop was opened in Cairo in 1550. By 1650, coffee houses had reached London and Paris and became increasingly popular from then on. Coffee is grown almost every country with a suitable tropical climate, through most of Central and South America and the Pacific Island region, as well.

Raw coffee beans are a greenish yellow color and have no coffee flavor. After roasting, the essential oils in the bean are released, giving coffee its distinct flavor and aroma. The coffee will continue to release essential oils, and lose flavor, if it is not cooled immediately after roasting. Grinding also releases flavor, which is why we often don't grind coffee until we are going to use it.

From Montesquieu's Lettres persanes, written during the 18th century:

"Great is the vogue of coffee in Paris. In the houses where it is supplied, the proprietors know how to prepare it in such a way that it gives wit to those who drink it. At any rate, when they depart, all of them believe themselves to be at least four times as brainy as when they entered the doors."

Cappucino anyone?

You can rent

The Old Caboose

. . . for your party, dinner, or meeting . . .

($25 + deposit) **Call 483-4256**

Stick it in *The Rag*

for only $10 month.

You can't get any more local than this!

Send your copy to The Old Caboose by the 3rd Thursday and you'll see your ad here the following month.

Many payment plans. Trust us.

The Depot Town Rag:

All the news in one block in one month

Sidetrack's interior modifications to continue

David French reports that he and sister Linda are in the planning stages for yet another improvement upon their venerable watering hole next to the railroad tracks. Interior modifications are in the drawing stages for the short end of their L-shaped serving area which will see the bathrooms removed and more table and booth spaces - and more windows - facing their recently installed trackside patio.

The longer of L of the former Depot Exchange wraps around the entire Sidetrack Grill and the back portion is where new bathrooms will be installed.

Facing the railroad/street crossing has proven to be an asset for this business, and even more windows toward such an exciting view will bring one more uniqueness to the block's theme. Notice how many businesses take advantage of the singularity of what was once a liability to many less creative entrepreneurs.

And, no, Linda and Dave didn't copy their name from Garrison Keillor's 'Sidetrack Tap,' of Lake Woebegon fame. It was the other way around.

Sponsors thanked and encouraged

Many of our loyal sponsors will see their year-long support of *The Rag* has has expired with this issue and will find a thankful note in the mail this month which encourages them to continue their support of the district's monthly newsletter. No other single organization so continuously promotes the neighborhood and its businesses as does *The Rag*, and we hope the tradition of mutuality will continue into yet another exciting year

Boy Governor arrives on first train, brings official proclimation

It's an incubator district

A 1979 directory shows the staying power (**boldface**) of many of our businesses:

On River Street:
- Meleco Running Board Co.
- Wiard's
- **Fantasee Lighting**
- **Miller Auto Sales**
- Huron Advertising
- Washtenaw Cartage
- Lawson's Upholstery
- Ted's Auto Electric

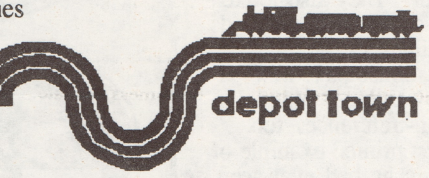
On Ninde Street:
- Godin's Volkswagen Service

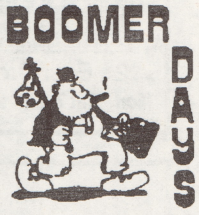
On East Cross Street:
- **The Sidetrack**
- Depot Exchange
- Artrain
- Depot Town General Store
- Natural Foods, **River Art Works,** and Now & Then Antiques
- Bradstreet Glass, Ltd.
- Cooper TV
- **Ike's Barber Shop**
- Old Town Restaurant
- Huron Valley TV
- Gas Station & Beer Store
- S.P.D. Tile
- **City Body Shop**
- Fidelity Life Insurance
- City Radiator Service
- B & D Retail Htg. & Plbg.
- K B & D Plumbing Inc.
- Rainbow Silk Screen Co.
- J.C.T. Antiques
- Isshinryu Karate
- **Farmers' Market**
- Fraternal Order of Eagles
- **Standard Printing Co.**
- Weber's Depot Pharmacy
- The Alibi

DTA logos remembered:

The district's first logo was slick: Richard Macias, of Preservation/Urban Design Inc. was contracted to do the 1976 Depot Town Plan and chose to use a railroad signal as the 'T' in our name. Until that time, the district was mostly known as 'the depot,' but Macias' name stuck.

The 'crawler' logo was emblazoned on both *The Rag* and DTA's letterhead. Some thought it had been stolen from Aubree's menus and ads and it soon 'filled up' at the printers and nobody could repeat the three-line curve with any degree of accuracy -- so it was dropped. Even this example is a little squiggly on the left.





"Boomer" showed up for four or five consecutive spring celebrations. It was an innocent rallying point for families to play with. Reliving the days of tramps and hoboes in the railroad district was lot of fun - until America's homeless problem made the news. After that it just didn't seem politically correct any more.

Holiday's past; block back to normal

• Seasonal celebrations were kicked off with December's Victorian Holiday at the Farmers' Market and throughout many shops' open houses up and down the block. It was a happy holiday season in Depot Town and many are to be thanked for making it all happen.

• The constant stream of cars into Riverside Park's Festival of Lights has ended. Christmas displays in the district's shop windows are being replaced with signs of hope for spring. Now St. Patrick's Day plans are being made to parade to the district from the water tower.

• DTA president, Judi Monaghan, thanks Pam Hamblin, Dave French and Matt Cahill for helping her get the greens and bows on the street. The lamp poles were decorated from the river to River Street.

• Depot Town's shop windows have never looked so beautiful as during this past season. The swagged greens and the twinkling white lights and bows made it a delight to sees

• Window awards were given out to every participant - with a cagetory created to fit every design of the season.

New tale in the old tradition:

Strange 'crime,' unusual circumstances

The dailies often report of breakings and enterings where people return home to find their living space disrupted, vandalized and generally messed up. Just the opposite happened to "Jim," whose real identity will be protected here.

Jim isn't the world's best housekeeper and, when he returned from a three-week vacation to Maine this summer, he found someone had entered his home - and *cleaned it up* for him.

The kitchen and bath were spotless, the windows washed, clothes folded and put away, cupboards organized and even some burned-out light bulbs had been replaced.

Astounded by the new-found cleanliness and order of his domicile, Jim spent the next three weeks doing some amateur detective work on the block. Some of his neighbors knew he had never bothered to lock his doors, and the list of 'suspects' was short.

When he finally discovered the loveable culprits, he offered to take them out to dinner to demonstrate his thankfulness for their good deed - but they refused. They wanted to be paid for the effort, instead. The strange friendship is still negotiating the terms of the agreement/disagreement.

Past DTA presidents: Where are they now?

Gerry French, our founder, is back on the block helping with brother Bill's new Old Town Café.

Beverly Shankwiler and husband, Don, retired and moved to a 'fishing camp up north.'

Tom Dodd moved back to the Township, but he still edits *The Rag*. He and Bettie still serve as secretary and treasurer.

Carolyn McKeever and **Gary McKeever** still own two buildings and now live on Ford Lake.

Rex Richie, with wife, Sally, sold their ice cream parlor but still own the recently painted Newel Block.

Jacob Guter, a practicing architect in Marquette, Michigan with wife Mary Doll.

Paul Fetters, chair of the Depot Town Downtown Development Authority, is in his fifthteenth year of business at River Artworks.

A. William French expanded from Aubree's Saloon to Sticks, Old Town Café and Cady's with partner/wife Sandee.

David Blackmer assists wife, Gwen, at Miller's Ice Cream and Depot Town Travel.

Judith D. Monaghan, our current president, lives above the Depot Doo hair salon.

Guarantee
Your support makes a difference!

Please include me among the members of
The Depot Town Association, Inc.

Name _____
Street _____
City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Annual dues:
- ❑ $25 Regular Member (Property or business owner)
- ❑ $10 Associate Member (Interested in and supportive)
- ❑ $100 Life Member (A great deal if you had joined in 1976!)
- ❑ Please place my name on the monthly mailing list of *The Depot Town Rag*
- ❑ Don't mail *The Rag*. I'll pick it up in the neighborhood.
- ✂ Clip and send check to "Depot Town Association" c/o The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Rag Readers
SUPPORT
Rag Sponsors!
Let them know you appreciate *their* support.

Depot Town Association, Inc., 18 November 1993

DTA: Firmly rooted in the past - with a clear view forward!

President Judi Monaghan called the meeting to order at the back table of the **Sidetrack Grill**.

The Treasury stands at $8420.00 with recent bills for Santa's beard, printing expenses, and covering the costs of closing and winterizing the Caboose.

Events Committee needs more help for the New Year's Eve event in the Freighthouse as the district's part of the annual Jubilee.

Talks continue with the **Ypsi Street Rods** club toward their first- weekend-in-May auto show in Riverside Park. DTA has offered to pay the cost of the necessary liability insurance up to $250. Portable toilets, traffic pattern and other details remain to be worked out. More news on this at next month's meeting.

***Rag* Reports** the January issue begins its seventeenth year with fascinating drawings of what could be our own rail yard in Ypsilanti.

A **St. Patrick's Day Parade** is being planned by the recently formed Gaelic League, with David French as its spokesperson. Starting from the Historic Water Tower, the noon event will coast down the hill to Depot Town with traditional events of the season happening throughout the district on Thursday, March 17. The League will meet at the Sidetrack at 8 p.m., Tuesday, January 9.

The extra effort of so many of the folks on the block toward the **exquisite holiday decor** was noted by many. Responses have been most enthusiastic this past season. All agreed it was the prettiest show on this block in many years.

The possibility of **new banners** for the light poles is being explored. City's DPW says it will install the winter snowflake banners as soon as possible. What about making new banners ourselves? Ideas proliferated.

A **Farmers' Market delegate** will need to be appointed for the next several meetings due to Pam Hamblin's necessary absence.

Window judging for the Victorian Holiday will take place Thursday, December 23rd with five Grand Prizes for excellence and twenty trophy prizes for all participants. Todd Reid will accompany DTA officers and Board in the night's tour.

Shoppers' Survey should be ready to start by January, reports Paul Fetters. This successful tool for measuring local demographics was abandonded about two years ago and may once again give merchants and officers valuable feedback on who comes to this district and why.

Juried art fairs and other promotional possibilities were discussed for the **1994 Heritage Festival.** Who would jury? How do we find the artists? Why didn't the sculpture contest work out? What would be theplacement pattern in the street? Who buys 'serious' art in Ypsilanti? More discussion will surely follow.

The Ypsilanti Visitors and Convention Bureau again reports they are still out of of **Depot Town Brochures**, but there's no movement on preparing our fourth brochure yet. Karen Brenner has worked up a basic design for a new one which may be ready soon.

Kisosk updates are in progress with Huron Signs with some businesses doubling up. River Street names are still not clear and need to meet with Judi Monaghan soon.

Strictly local stuff:

January 1994

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

- **D'town Development Authority**
  8 a.m. Wednesday, 5th
  at The Daily Grind
- **Depot Town Association**
  7:30 p.m. Thursday, 20th
  at the Sidetrack Grill
- **Depot Town Antique Engine Club**
  7:30 pm Thursday, 27th
  at the Freighthouse Coffeeshop

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc. a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate. -Tom Dodd, editor

The Depot Town Association, Inc.
Judi D. Monaghan, president
c/o The Old Caboose
400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

The businesses shown in ads on this page were supporting us in the very first issues of *The Rag*, too. Now that's longevity! And we appreciate it.

Baked On Automotive Finishes • Complete Collision Repair
CITY BODY EST. 1930
CARSTAR
20 E. Cross Street
482-4737 • 482-9353 • Fax: 482-0181
Scott Sobbry Bruce Sobbry

City Body was sold, up-dated, greatly expanded and continues a fine, old tradition with a great logo indigenous to this block.

James MacDonald's Antiques
29 East Cross • 481-0555
Apple Annie's Vintage Clothing

James MacDonald added Lynn Radtke's talents to the shop and they've become an institution as the oldest antique shop in the block.

Aubree's SALOON
35 East Cross Street
Since 1873

Aubree's changed its name from The Alibi to Oliver's - then added Sticks - but it's the same wonderful railroad tavern that started in 1873.

HANSEN'S STANDARD PRINTING
35 E. Cross St. • Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198
(313) 483-0339 • FAX: (313) 483-3130

Carol and Loren Hansen have since bought the business from Mary and Loren Sr.

Ike's Depot
483-6300
BARBERSHOP
40 East Cross

Ike Rednour retired and sold the business to Sharon Ann Monroy. She figured it was a good name and stuck with it.

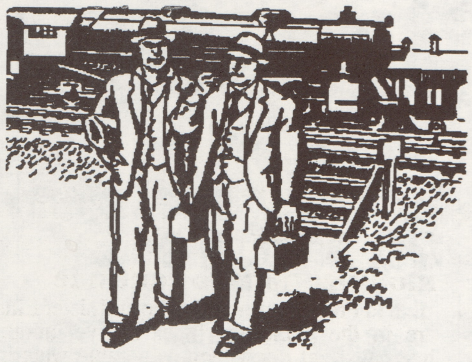
Hottest little corner bar & grill in town!
Rated best burgers! - *Detroit Monthly*
SIDETRACK Bar & Grill
• 8 beers on draught
Ypsilanti's Hottest Bar!
56 E. Cross • 483-1035

Sidetrack had recently replaced the Central Bar - and enjoys an excellent reputation in all its burgeoning manifestations over the years.

TED'S Auto Electric
307 North River • 483-1238

Ted Mull has been in this location for more than 25 years.

Artist could have been in Depot Town



"I dunno, ???; a floral display of roses and peonies in the shape of Eleanor Roosevelt doesn't sound like a prize winner to me!"

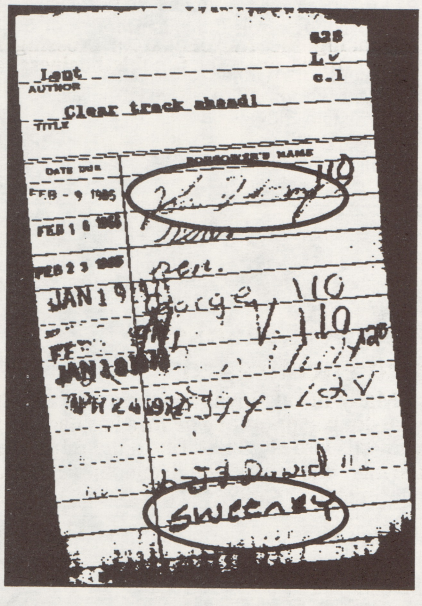
Sure looks like the Freighthouse in the background doesn't it? Not too much imagination is needed to see the stationmaster talking with the gardener on their way across the tracks to the depot/greenhouse in Ypsilanti.

Grace Sweeney found a copy of Henry B. Lent's "Clear Track Ahead" at a book sale recently. The book is obviously for kids who love trains and was published by The Macmillan Company in 1944. It was popular for many years in the Mitchell School Library in what was then the East Ann Arbor Public Schools - Pittsfield School District No. 9 and still carried the school's library card in the little pocket in the back.

The first name on that library card is "John Delcamp" from room 110 and he checked the book out on February 9, 1965. That made John a 6th grader at the time- in Roger Mahee's room. Now John has five children of his own (from a two-year-old to kids at Adams, East and West Middle Schools and Ypsilanti High School) and they're just as interested in the old trains and the depot district. With this spread of school enrollees, some have suggested that John's the perfect candidate to serve on the Board of Education, but that's another matter.

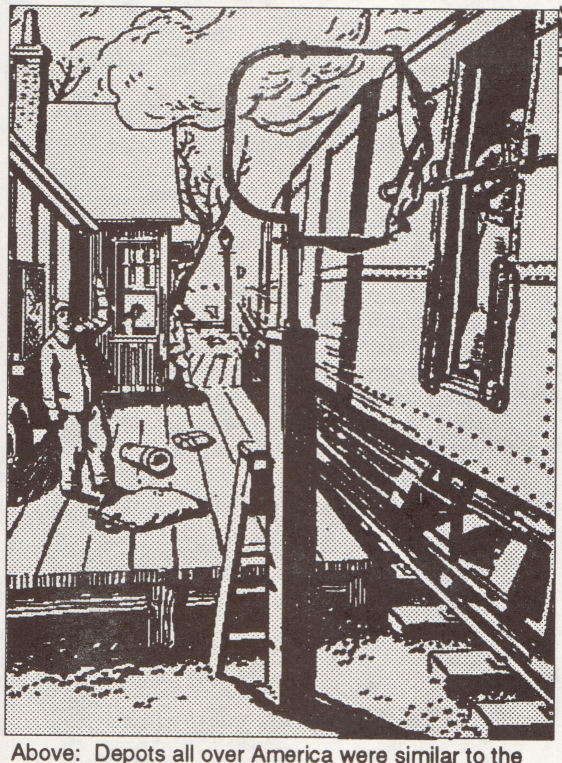
John certainly qualifies as a Depot Towner, living for nine years at the 'five points' of Cross, Prospect and Miles, another four years up River Street, and the last four on Oak Street.

Could it be that it was these drawings that drew John and his family to Depot Town? They sure look like the artist had passed through this railroad district more than once.

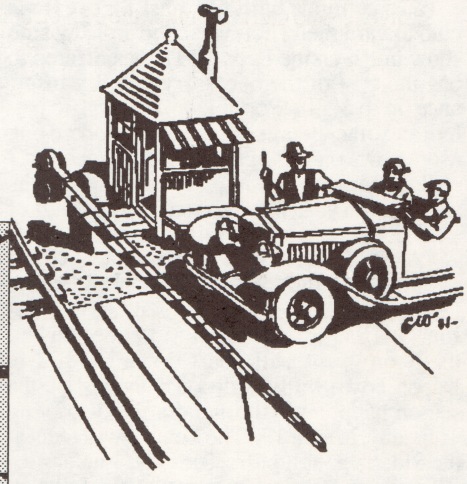


Above: According to the library card at the back of Mitchell School's copy of "Clear Track Ahead!" John Delcamp checked it out in 1965. Grace Sweeney saved it from the book sale and passed it on to Depot Town in a glorious effort for posterity.

Thanks, Grace!

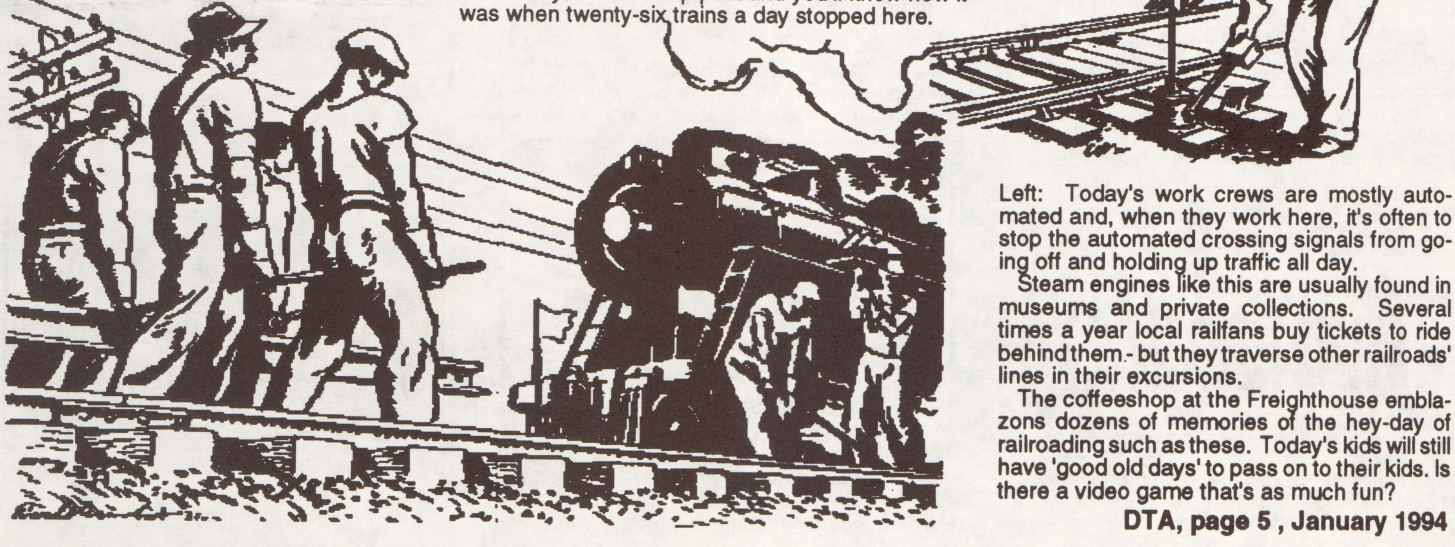


Above: Depots all over America were similar to the scene in Ypsilanti -- just add a view down River Street beyond the lamp post and you'll know how it was when twenty-six trains a day stopped here.



Above: The view from Sidetrack's upper windows looks a lot like what could be one of Jack Miller's Hudsons at the Crossing Guard Tower. This tower looks like the one that stood here between the 1893 tower and its modern replica - except it's only a one-story example.

Below: Today's crews change the same switches in the same ways. Only the uniform has changed. There are fewer switches in Depot Town now, with only two of the original tracks remaining. All of the house tracks and team tracks have been removed in recent years.



Left: Today's work crews are mostly automated and, when they work here, it's often to stop the automated crossing signals from going off and holding up traffic all day.

Steam engines like this are usually found in museums and private collections. Several times a year local railfans buy tickets to ride behind them - but they traverse other railroads' lines in their excursions.

The coffeeshop at the Freighthouse emblazons dozens of memories of the hey-day of railroading such as these. Today's kids will still have 'good old days' to pass on to their kids. Is there a video game that's as much fun?

Ad Art
313-483-4256
517-592-8708
Design and Layout
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A Depot Town SAMPLER

Time's the test; old friends are best

That's the motto that was painted on a strip of leather that hung on the editor's bedroom wall when he was a tot. The illustration above it was of two Scottie dogs smiling at each other. They looked very much like those tiny magnetized plastic dogs his uncle controlled on the surface of the Sunday newspaper. They also looked like the dogs in the Black & White Scotch ads in the magazines at the time.

Perhaps it was their relationships to newspapers and magazines that intrigued the kid, but there were other - subtler - references, too.

It was, perhaps, the first printed example of parallel sentence structure he had ever seen. The semicolon neatly kept two complete sentence phrases apart; they were still in the same sentence, though [just like this one]. It was a neat way to say it twice - two different ways - with the hope of making your point.

He's been trying to live up to that literary structure ever since; it's a common format in the seventeen-year-old *Depot Town Rag*.

But the motto's main intent was to admonish us and warn us that today's friends could well be our *old friends* if we just treat each other well. Maybe that's why Depot Town is so much more successful than the modern strip malls out along the highway. In one hundred and sixty two years of commercial continuity we certainly have valued our old friends.

Whether they be the customers, the shop owners, the folks who live or work up the hill, the residents up over the store, the weekend antiquers or fans at a concert, we enjoy a host of 'old friends' that can seldom be garnered from a computerized merge-mail index.

Four years ago the Depot Town Association conducted a year-long 'Shopper Survey' asking our clientele to respond to several short questions and maybe win a free dinner. We learned that most of our business is supported by folks who've been coming here for years. They weren't impressed by trends of funk and flash. Most of them drove less five miles to get here - or they walked.

This month the survey will be reinstituted; maybe we'll find some *new* old friends.

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